DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 645 EA 022 225

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TITLE Yes, We Can Improve Staff Morale.
PUB DATE Oct 89
NOTE 9p.; Address before the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (51st, Cleveland, OH, October 19, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Effectiveness; Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; Incentives; Job Satisfaction; Leadership Qualities; Motivation; Need Gratification; Organizational Climate; *Personnel Management; Quality of Working Life; *School Administration; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Morale; Teaching Conditions; Teamwork

ABSTRACT

A literature review and discussion the effect of school administrators on staff morale is presented in this paper. Four factors for improving staff morale include: a supportive workplace; meaningful incentives; a good working environment; and personal display of high morale by the administrator. Ten recommendations for improving staff relations are listed, which stress the importance of recognition of individual worth and clearly defined job responsibilities. Consideration of personal as well as material needs is crucial to personnel morale. (LMI)

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YES, WE CAN IMPROVE STAFF MORALE

ADDRESS AT THE 51ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL

PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATORS

Cleveland, OH

Oct. 19, 1989

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EA 022 225

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Dick B. Clough

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I am pleased to see that so many school administrators are interested in improving staff morale. Working with an enthusiastic, highly motivated staff is at the top of all of our list of priorities.

Let's begin our discussion this morning by looking at just what morale is and is not. While morale has many manifestations, I think of it as "professional interest and enthusiasm that a person displays toward the achievement of individual and group goals in a given job situation". Likewise, morale should be thought of as a "forward-looking and confident state of mind relevant to a shared purpose".

High staff morale is associated with feelings of belongingness, togetherness, achievement and self and group esteem. On the other hand, low morale is associated with frustration, alientation and a feeling of powerlessness.

Let me say a few additional things about the concept of staff morale before I go further. First, for the most part morale is an intangible ingredient, difficult to define or describe. Secondly, morale is difficult to effectively measure, particularily for the leader. Next, morale is in constant flux, with numerous peaks and valleys. And finally, morale manifests itself in a number of different factors---with no single factor always present.

Often times, staff morale is viewed from the perspective of low morale which is evidenced by (1) a high employee absentee rate; (2) a high employee turnover rate; (3) lack of employee willingness to volunteer for tasks; and (4) constant conflict among staff members.

How does one go about improving staff morale in a school? I would suggest four basic ideas:

1. Provide a supportive workplace for your staff.
   a. Teachers need your emotional support---reduce stress rather than add to it.
   b. Foster a spirit of cooperation and teamwork among your staff members.
   c. Reduce threats and defensiveness on your part.
   d. Take steps to increase staff member's job security.
   e. Help teachers to have a sense of belonging to the staff.
   f. Give teachers your time---this is an important resource.
2. Provide meaningful incentives for good performance.
   a. Everyone likes to have a "pat on the back", give staff members positive feedback.
   b. Encourage new and innovative practices among teachers. Remember things don't always have to be done the same way.
   c. Organize programs like "Teacher of the Month" or "Staff Member of the Week" and give media coverage to the recognition of outstanding staff members.
   d. Give teachers responsibilities, praise and respect.
3. Provide as good a physical environment as possible for your staff.
   a. See your role of administrator as assisting teachers to have adequate instructional materials to enhance learning.
   b. Make sure equipment (especially audio-visual) is in proper working order.

c. See that the building is both safe and clean.

4. Finally, display high morale yourself.

a. Morale is catching---teachers will take their cue from you in regard to attitudes.

b. Be the leader---Be WALT, Walk, Act, Look and Talk like a leader.

c. Be cautious about blaming others, take responsibility and blame when it is yours.

d. Communicate confidence in your staff and in their abilities.

Research has clearly shown that the effectiveness of leadership is the single most important factor in staff morale. Let's look for a moment at administrative behaviors that can contribute to high staff morale. Clifford Campbell's study of administrative behaviors that most please teachers give clear indication of factors that contribute to high morale. These administrative behaviors included: (1) showing interest in the teacher's work and offering assistance; (2) supporting the actions and decisions of staff members; (3) allowing self-direction in work and showing confidence in the ability of teachers; and (4) allowing the staff to participate in the decision-making process.

Likewise, Wade and Kerby studied in great detail the characteristics of principals who appeared to have high morale among staff members. Their research pointed out the following as important characteristics:

1. Principals were consistent.

a. They kept their word to staff members.

b. They did not have wide swings in moods.

c. They appeared to try to have been fair in their dealings with teachers.

2. Principals were comnpetent.
   a. Lack of competency usually manifested itself in a lack of self-confidence.
   b. Managed conflict, didn't suppress it.
   c. Held high expectations of themselves and others.
   d. Demonstrated effective situational leadership skills.
3. Principals were good communicators.
   a. Inovolved others in setting objectives, planning and decision-making.
   b. Good listeners---appeared to be interested in others.
   c. Had open-door policy.
4. Principals were sensitive to the needs of others.
   a. Gave recognition to the contribution of staff members---our school rather than my school.
   b. Encouraged staff members to express their views.
   c. Knew their staff members not just as teachers but as individuals.

In the same vain the Phi Delta Kappa Commission on Teacher/Faculty Morale found the following administrator's behaviors as desirable for contributing to high staff morale:

1. The principal should assume responsibility for establishing challenging goals for the school and faculty.
2. The principal should provide feedback on progress toward goals.
3. The principal should work toward establishing mutual confidence and trust.

4. The principal should exhibit behavior congruent with democratic values.
5. The principal must increase the teachers' responsibility and provide for some degree of academic freedom.
6. The principal must establish equity in teacher assignments.
7. The principal must provide the opportunities for growth and development on the part of staff members.

This same Commission reported that staff morale is closely allied with the concepts of shared purpose and a sense of belonging on the part of staff members. It also concluded that the following administrative practices were prevalent in school districts with good staff morale:

1. The authority of superintendents, principals and teaching staff are well defined and publicly known.
2. The school district is organized so that decisions are made at the lowest possible level.
3. The chief administrator and the staff have a fully developed and well-articulated educational philosophy.
4. Teachers are actively encouraged and supported in working with the community and in developing objectives that relate to community needs.
5. Administrators perceive themselves as being educational leaders and are active in shaping ideas and communicating philosophies, ideas and values.
6. Teaching staff is relatively well paid in relationship to community standards.

In addition to looking at administrative behaviors that contribute to high morale, I think it is important to be aware of actions that lead to lower staff morale. I would suggest that the following behaviors will dop just that:

1. Practice group censure or criticism when one or two individuals are guilty of breaking a rule.
2. Conduct long faculty meetings that seem to lack a central purpose or theme.
3. Don't let staff members know what they need to know. Good communications are important.
4. Make all decisions yourself regardless of how minor or insignificant they may be.
5. Take a lazzie-faire attitude towards disagreements or conflict between staff members.
6. Believe that only high pay and shorter working hours will improve your staff's morale. You are kidding yourself if you believe this to be true.

Let me conclude my remarks today by giving you ten keys to the development of good supervisory relationships with your staff. These keys include:

1. Treat your subordinates as individuals. Get to know them as people.
2. Give your subordinates as much opportunity for growth and change as possible.
3. But refrain from getting involved in your subordinates personal lives.
4. Compliment your subordinates frequently. Thank them for their good work.
5. Organize the work of your subordinates. Make certain they have all

the information they need to do a good job before you give them the assignment.

6. Allow your subordiantes to express their creativity.
7. Establish a relazing atmosphere by using your sense of humor.
8. Give your subordinates work they are capable of completing.
9. Refrain from asking your subordinates to do personal jobs for you, such as typing your son's term paper.
10. Remain available after you delegate work so that your subordinates can ask questions.